

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 VIENTI 02696 01 OF 02 061449 Z

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ACTION A-01

INFO OCT-01 EA-04 ADP-00 SS-07 NSC-04 NSCE-00 H-03 RSC-01

RSR-01 AID-01 SSO-00 /023 W
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O 061315 Z APR 73

FM AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

TO SECSTATE IMMEDIATE 3480

INFO CINCPAC IMMEDIATE

CDR JCRC NKP THAI IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY BANGKOK IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY SAIGON IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 VIENTIANE 2696

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MOPS, PFOR, LA

SUBJECT: SENATOR BROOKE'S DISCUSSION WITH LPF

REPRESENTATIVE ON POW/ MIA QUESTION

SUMMARY: IN COURSE OF SENATOR BROOKE'S MEETING WITH LPF REPRESENTATIVE SOTH PHETRASY ON APRIL 6, LATTER FORMALLY STATED THAT LPF HOLDS NO MORE AMERICAN PRISONERS IN LAOS. SOTH SAID ONLY PRISONERS LPF HELD WERE THE NINE WHO WERE RETURNED TO USG IN HANOI ON MARCH 28. SENATOR BROOKE SUGGESTED THAT SEARCH FOR MIAS NOT BE LINKED TO LAO CEASEFIRE AGREEMENT BUT THAT THIS ACTIVITY BE UNDERTAKEN SEPARATELY AND START FORTHWITH. TOWARD THAT END SENATOR SUGGESTED ESTABLISHMENT OF A JOINT BODY IN EFFORT TO SHED LIGHT ON FATE OF MIAS. SOTH PHETRASY AGREED TO TRANSMIT THIS SUGGESTION TO SOUPHANOUVONG IN SAM NEUA. END SUMMARY

1. SENATOR BROOKE, ACCOMPANIED BY DCM, CALLED ON LPF VIENTIANE REPRESENTATIVE SOTH PHETRASY MORNING APRIL 6 IN COURSE OF TWO HOUR 15 MINUTE CONVERSATION, THREE SUBJECTS WERE DISCUSSED: (A) RECONSTRUCTION ASSISTANCE TO INDO-CHINA; (B) PROSPECTS FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF VIENTIANE CEASEFIRE AGREEMENT; (C) POWS AND MIAS. THIS MESSAGE
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PAGE 02 VIENTI 02696 01 OF 02 061449 Z

DEALS ONLY WITH LAST SUBJECT.

2. SENATOR BROOKE EXPLAINED THAT HE EXPECTS PRESIDENT NIXON TO PROPOSE TO CONGRESS A PLAN FOR RECONSTRUCTION ASSISTANCE FOR INDOCHINA IN KEEPING WITH THE AGREEMENTS SIGNED EARLIER THIS YEAR. WHILE THE PRESIDENT CAN PROPOSE SUCH A PROGRAM, THE SENATOR NOTED THAT CONGRESS CONTROLS THE PURSE STRINGS TO IMPLEMENT SUCH A PROGRAM. THE SENATOR THEN LISTED SOME OF THE DIFFICULTIES SUCH A PROGRAM WILL ENCOUNTER BOTH IN CONGRESS AND WITH THE AMERICAN PEOPLE: (A) THE ECONOMIC SITUATION IN THE UNITED STATES; (B) THE PENCHANT OF MANYMEMBERS OF CONGRESS AND A LARGE SECTOR OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE TO SPEND MONEY AT HOME RATHER THAN ABROAD;(C) THE GROWING OPPOSITION WITHIN THE CONGRESS AND IN THE COUNTRY TO SPEND AMERICAN MONEY ON RECONSTRUCTION OF INDOCHINA, PARTICULARLY IN NORTH VIETNAM. THIS OPPOSITION THE SENATOR NOTED, IS STRENGTHENED BY TWO EVENTS: (A) THE ALLEGATION OF TORTURE OF AMERICAN POWS BY NORTH VIETNAMESE AND VIET CONG; (A) THE SMALL NUMBER OF AMERICAN POWS RETURNED IN LAOS CONSIDERING THE LARGE NUMBER OF AMERICANS MISSING IN LAOS. SPECIFICALLY, THE SENATOR MENTIONED THAT, ACCORDING TO USG RECORDS, 318 AMERICAN MILITARY PERSONNEL ARE MISSING OR WERE CAPTURED IN LAOS. IN ADDITION WE HAVE NO INFORMATION ON THE FATE OF SIX MISSING AMERICAN CIVILIANS. OF THE 324 AMERICANS MISSING OR CAPTURED IN LAOS, ONLY NINE (7 MILITARY AND 2 CIVILIANS) HAVE BEEN RETURNED TO US. FURTHER-MORE, THE PATHET LAO HAVE NOT GIVEN US ANY ACCOUNT ON THE FATE OF THOSE CARRIED AS MIA.

3. THE SENATOR EXPLAINED AT LENGTH BOTH THE HUMANITARIAN AND LEGAL PROBLEMS CREATED BY NOT KNOWING WHETHER A MIA IS DEAD OR ALIVE AND NOTED THAT MANY OF HIS COLLEAGUES BELIEVE THAT THE ADVERSARY HAS NOT DONE ENOUGH TO PROVIDE INFORMATION ON MIAS. MANY MEMBERS OF CONGRESS ARE DISINCLINED TO SUPPORT RECONSTRUCTION AID UNLESS PROPER ACCOUNTING PROCEDURES ARE ESTABLISHED FOR MIAS. SENATOR BROOKE SAID THAT THE PATHET LAO MIGHT WISH TO KNOW ABOUT THE SENTIMENT OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE AND OF THE MEMBERS OF CONGRESS REGARDING RECONSTRUCTION AID FOR INDOCHINA AND APPLY ITS CLOSE RELATIONSHIP TO THE
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 VIENTI 02696 01 OF 02 061449 Z

PRISONER AND MIA PROBLEM.

4. SENATOR BROOKE SUGGESTED THAT THE PATHET LAO PROVIDE INFORMATION ON POWS AND MIAS BOTH IN THEIR SELF- INTEREST, (I. E. TO STRENGTHEN THE ARGUMENTS OF THOSE AMERICANS FAVORABLY DISPOSED TOWARD RECONSTRUCTION ASSISTANCE) AND ALSO TO ALLEVIATE THE SUFFERING OF FAMILIES WHO HAVE LOVED ONE MISSING OR CAPTURED DURING THE WAR. THE SENATOR POINTED OUT THAT HE WAS SPEAKING AS A MEMBER OF THE LEGISLATIVE BRANCH AND NOT FOR THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH. HE BELIEVES THAT CONGRESS NEEDS SOME INDICATION THAT THE FORMER ADVERSARY WISHES TO COOPERATE WITH THE USG ON ISSUES OF VITAL INTEREST TO THE UNITED STATES, SUCH AS POWS/ MIAS, IF THE CONGRESS IS TO VOTE FUNDS FOR THE RECONSTRUCTION OF INDOCHINA, INCLUDING NORTH VIETNAM. THE SENATOR OPINED THAT PROBABLY EVERY ONE OF THE 100 SENATORS HAS A CONSTITUENT WHO HAS A LOVED ONE MISSING IN INDOCHINA AND THESE CONSTITUENTS REPRESENT A VOCAL AND SIGNIFICANT GROUP INFLUENCING THE MEMBERS OF THE SENATE. AS A POLITICIAN, THE SENATOR SAID, SOTH PHETRASY SHOULD UNDERSTAND THIS PRESSURE.

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PAGE 01 VIENTI 02696 02 OF 02 061450 Z

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 VIENTIANE 2696

5. SOTH REPLIED THAT AMERICAN PRISONERS IN LAOS HAD NOT BEEN TORTURED. IN LAOS, SOTH NOTED, THE LPF HAD ASKED " ANOTHER COUNTRY" (I. E., DRV) TO KEEP THE AMERICAN POWS. WHEN POWS WERE CAPTURED IN LAOS, SOTH SAID THE

LPF CENTRAL COMMITTEE HAD GIVEN STRICT INSTRUCTIONS NOT TO HURT THE PRISONERS. ACCORDING TO SOTH, SOMETIMES THE POPULATION WAS FILLED WITH HATRED FOR THE PILOTS WHO HAD BOMBED THEIR VILLAGES AND FIELDS BUT WHEN LPF TROOPS TOOK CUSTODY OF DOWNED PILOTS, THEY PROTECTED THEM AGAINST RETALIATORY ACTIONS BY THE POPULATION. SOTH SAID THAT THIS HATRED BY THE PEOPLE MUST BE UNDERSTOOD AND HE CAN NOT BLAME PEOPLE WHOSE HOMES HAVE BEEN DESTROYED BY THE BOMBINGS FOR FEELING THE WAY THEY DID. HE EMPHASIZED THAT PATHET LAO GAVE FAIR TREATMENT TO PRISONERS, GAVE THEM MEDICAL HELP IF NEEDED, AND FED THEM TO THE BEST OF THEIR ABILITY. HE STRESSED, HOWEVER, THAT LAO RESOURCES TO PROVIDE MEDICAL CARE AND NOURISHMENT TO PRISONERS WERE LIMITED. YET THE AMERICAN PRISONERS RECEIVED LARGER AND BETTER FOOD RATIONS THAN LAO THEMSELVES BECAUSE LPF REALIZE DIFFERENT LIVING STANDARDS BETWEEN THE TWO PEOPLE. SOTH CONCLUDED THAT " NOBODY HAS THE RIGHT TO CRITICIZE THE PATHET LAO ON WHAT THEY HAVE DONE IN THIS FIELD BECAUSE THEY DID THE BEST THEY COULD FOR THE AMERICAN PRISONERS WITH THEIR LIMITED RESOURCES."

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 02 VIENTI 02696 02 OF 02 061450 Z

6. AS FOR THE NUMBER OF AMERICAN POWS, SOTH STRESSED THAT IF PILOTS WERE SHOT DOWN IN THE DISTANT JUNGLE AREAS HELD BY LPF, SOLDIERS OR VILLAGERS RARELY TOOK THE TROUBLE TO TREK SEVERAL MILES TO FIND OUT WHETHER THERE WERE ANY SURVIVORS. HE SAID: " THE LPF HAS RELEASED ALL US PRISONERS CAPTURED IN LAOS." HE REPEATED AT LEAST TWICE THAT ACCORDING TO BEST KNOWLEDGE OF LPF CENTRAL COMMITTEE, ALL SURVIVING AMERICANS CAPTURED IN LAOS WERE RELEASED TO USG IN HANOI ON MARCH 28. IN REPLY TO SENATOR'S QUESTION WHETHER THIS INFORMATION HAS BEEN PUBLICLY ANNOUNCED BY SAM NEUA, SOTH SAID THAT US EMBASSY VIENTIANE HAD BEEN KEPT INFORMED BUT INFO HAS NOT BEEN PUBLICIZED BY THE LPF.

7. SENATOR BROOKE CONTINUED TO PRESS SOTH, INQUIRING WHETHER LPF HAD MADE VERY POSSIBLE EFFORT TO ASCERTAIN THAT NO MORE AMERICANS ARE LIVING UNDER LPF CONTROL, PERHAPS IN SOME REMOTE CAVE. SOTH REITERATED THAT TO THE BEST OF LPF KNOWLEDGE, NO AMERICANS ARE ALIVE IN THE LPF CONTROLLED ZONE.

8. AS FOR INFORMATION ON MIAS, SOTH STATED THAT ARTICLE 5 OF THE VIENTIANE ACCORD PROVIDES FOR THE EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION ON THIS SUBJECT. HE SAID HOWEVER THAT IT WOULD TAKE TIME TO DEVELOP THIS INFORMATION BECAUSE OF

THE DIFFICULTY IN GETTING TO DISTANT CRASH SITES.
FURTHERMORE, IMPLEMENTATION OF THIS ARTICLE OF VIENTIANE
AGREEMENT MUST AWAIT AGREEMENT BY THE TWO LAO PARTIES
ON ALL OTHER OUTSTANDING POLITICAL AND MILITARY ISSUES.

9. SENATOR BROOKE SEIZED UPON THIS STATEMENT TO
POINT OUT THE CRUELTY OF PERMITTING UNCERTAINTY TO
PERSIST ON THE FATE OF THOSE MISSING IN ACTION. HE
STRESSED THAT THIS PROBLEM MUST BE RESOLVED QUICKLY AND
MUST NOT BE LINKED TO OTHER ASPECTS OF LAO NEGOTIATIONS.
FROM ALL HE HAS HEARD, THE SENATOR SAID, IT MIGHT BE
A LONG TIME BEFORE THE TWO LAO PARTIES COULD AGREE ON
THE OUTSTANDING ISSUES. HENCE THE SEARCH FOR MIAS
SHOULD NOT BE LINKED TO OR BE DEPENDENT ON A SETTLEMENT
OF THE OTHER PROBLEMS EXISTING BETWEEN THE LAO PARTIES.
THE SENATOR SUGGESTED THAT A BODY BE ESTABLISHED FOR
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PAGE 03 VIENTI 02696 02 OF 02 061450 Z

THE PURPOSE OF CLARIFYING THE FATE OF THE MIAS. THE
SENATOR SAID HE HAD NO PRECISE SUGGESTION FOR THE
COMPOSITION OF THIS BODY-- PERHAPS A BILATERAL US- LAO
ORGANIZATION, OR SOME OTHER EFFECTIVE TYPE OF BODY--
BUT WHAT COUNTED WAS TO ORGANIZE SOME PROGRAM RAPIDLY
WITH LPF WHICH COULD START WITHOUT DELAY THE SEARCH
FOR MIAS. MEMBERS OF THIS ORGANIZATION SHOULD BE
PERMITTED TO GO TO CRASH SITES AND WORK WITH POPULATION
TO FIND OUT WHETHER ANY SURVIVORS REMAIN OR TO OBTAIN
INFORMATION ON BURIAL SITES. BY CLARIFYING THE FATE
OF THE MIAS, THE SENATOR SAID, THE LPF WOULD BOTH
HELP HUMANITARIAN CAUSE AS WELL AS ADVANCE PROSPECTS
FOR RECONSTRUCTION AID FOR INDOCHINA.

10. SOTH REPLIED THAT ACCORDING TO THE VIENTIANE
AGREEMENT, QUESTION OF MIAS IS TO BE HANDLED BY THE
TWO LAO PARTIES AND IS ONLY ONE OF MANY PROVISIONS
THAT NEEDS TO BE IMPLEMENTED. HOWEVER, IN RESPONSE
TO SENATOR'S PLEA AND ELOQUENT PRESENTATION, SOTH
PROMISED TO TRANSMIT SENATOR'S SUGGESTION FOR IMMEDIATE
HANDLING OF MIA PROBLEM TO PRINCE SOUPHANOUVONG IN SAM
NEUA. SOTH SAID HE DOES NOT KNOW WHEN SOUPHANOUVONG
OR LPF CENTRAL COMMITTEE WILL REPLY TO SENATOR'S
SUGGESTION, BUT IN SOTH'S VIEW, LPF WILL ONLY UNDER-
TAKE SEARCH FOR MIAS " WITH ITS OWN MEANS". THE SENATOR
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